

While the Morse code is neither useless nor obsolete as a valuable mode of communication, it is no longer a necessary prerequisite for obtaining an amateur radio operator license. With the advances in technology, including receiving and transmitting equipment, the vast majority of emergency communications are now handled via voice communications. In any case, the value of CW as an emergency communications mode is overstated when examined in the context of a mandatory 5 wpm code test. Even in those rare instances where a CW signal might be of some assistance in a difficult situation where propagation or geomagnetic conditions hamper voice communications, only highly competent CW operators will be able to add any real value. Those who have just passed the 5 wpm test and never honed their skills would be of no more use than a student pilot who tries a complex instrument approach to minimums in a snowstorm.

As the son of a WWII radio code operator whose mission success (and on several occasions, the lives of his crew members) depended on being able to send and receive coded signals from a B-17 bomber, I respect and appreciate the honorable tradition of Morse code in radio communications. I am and will remain an avid and almost daily user of mode A1A on the amateur bands, and I believe that many new amateur licensees will be drawn to CW because it is useful and fun and a “special” skill that sets them apart from the rest... not necessarily “better,” but certainly special, just as anyone in any hobby or occupation with a special skill. The FCC is actually doing the amateur radio service a favor by discontinuing the use of the code as a licensing tool because the absence of the code requirement will help us recruit new members. We may need Morse code for many things, but we don’t need it as a rite of passage, disincentive, or obstacle to prospective amateurs.

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